COMMANDERS DIGEST

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The Services' Top NCOs

The top four noncommissioned officers of the U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps and U.S. Air Force were interviewed recently by the Commanders Digest to provide commanders their personal thoughts on important subjects of reintive concern to the Department of Defense.

The four men are Sergeant Major of the Army Leon L. Van Autreve, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy John D. Whittet, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Clinton A. Puckett and Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Thomas N. Barnes.

These professional Servicemen have a total of 112 years of continuous active duty in all of the Military Services. They represent more than 1,984,000 enlisted men and women. Each man has served from the lowest levels of military operation up to the highest possible echelon in his Service. Also, each man was personally selected, following keen competition for the job, by his Service's Chief of Staff.

These highly motivated noncoms continuously travel about the world to talk to enlisted personnel about their problems, gripes and needs. And, they are in touch with their Chiefs of Staff several times a month to "tell it like it is."

In this special interview, they were asked what they thought about such policy areas as retention for the All-Volunteer Force, education, women in the Services, and leadership at various levels of command. Here is what each man had to say to all commanders in all of the Military Services.

"In the areas of racial problems we are making perceptible progress."

LEON L. VAN AUTREVE

Sergeant Major of the Army

Sergeant Major of the Army Leon L. Van Autreve, 53, assumed the Army's top noncommissioned officer job in July 1973 as the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Army and Chief of Staff of the Army on matters affecting more than 763,000 enlisted men and women.

Born in Belgium, SMA Van Autreve has served on continuous active duty with the U.S. Army for almost 30 years, mostly with the Corps of Engineers. During World War II he served in Europe and his decorations include the Bronze Star Medal and the Soldiers Medal.

Prior to his Washington assignment SMA Van Autreve served in Alaska following a stint with the 20th Engineer Brigade in South Vietnam. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant major in 1962.

SMA Van Autreve is married and has two children. His home of record is Delphos, Ohio.

RETENTION

In the All-Volunteer Force, retention will certainly be assisted by an enhancement in the life style of our soldiers. In addition, the individual must be considered, must be listened to—vox populi. The distaff—family members are important considerations in retention; their life style and needs are important. One assist in the family attitude area is the stabilization program. The role of leadership cannot be overemphasized.

EDUCATION

In our ever-increasing competitive environment, a high school diploma should be the minimum desire of every soldier. Every motivated NCO will strive for more education, in the civilian as well as military area, and will most certainly want to contribute to the professionalism of the NCO Corps by attendance in the NCOES (Noncommissioned Officer Enlisted School) Program. The era of the 70s will tolerate nothing but the best. We cannot afford to have juniors more knowledgeable than their seniors.

MINORITIES

In the areas of racial problems, we are making perceptible progress. From the standpoint of behavior, we are perceiving a change toward individual as opposed to collective consideration. The ostrich-head-in-the-sand attitude is being overcome by an awareness that a problem does exist. This in itself is progress.

WOMEN

Women in leadership positions over males? Absolutely, if they are best qualified. Again, we are in a competitive environment. It is also good management to maximize utilization of all segments of our military population.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Army is privileged to participate in Community Service and activities when the project is of sufficient importance for military authorities to direct participation. I would assume it undesirable to intervene in a community's problems when the community has the wherewithal to help itself, and most desirable to assist when the need has been made apparent.

LEADERSHIP

Enlightened leadership does not provide a panacea for most problems, but it has been, and will continue to be, essential to goal achievement. Enlightened leadership provides the accuracy of communication, recognizes individual differences, actively counsels, assures mission performance, and enhances the professionalism of our Army. This I feel strongly about, for when provided, it resolves many problems, adds to retention and provides the type of Army most satisfying to the soldier as well as the civilian.

"I am optimistic that women will assume roles of varied and greater responsibility as we progress further into our new force structure."

THOMAS N. BARNES

Chief Master Sergeant of The Air Force

RETENTION

Job satisfaction, recognition for achievements, visible promotion and assignment systems, and continued upgrading of both bachelor and family quarters are most essential ingredients for retaining quality people. The aforementioned items are those most avidly sought. These, coupled with increased professional military education and relief of high cost of living impact by implementation of a Continental United States cost of living allowance and a variable housing allowance program, will adequately round out a sound retention program. Efforts and programs are already underway in some of the areas mentioned and will require continuing support and emphasis to insure the ultimate we seek in retention.

WOMEN IN THE SERVICE

I am optimistic that women will assume roles of varied and greater responsibility as we progress further into our new force structure. Present trends and indicators are that to date the program is successful. As with the total volunteer posture, we will be making changes as we go. Basically, because the United States military has no precedent for such an undertaking, I feel that the sooner it is realized there are some very basic psychological and physiological differences between male and female airmen that dictate (out of necessity) some disparity in requirements, then the sooner we can achieve all expectations.

EDUCATION

Educational opportunities are at an all-time high. The addition of the Community College of the Air Force to existing capabilities has vastly increased achievement of credits for military as well as nonmilitary courses. Some commands have developed in-house programs to insure that all personnel may obtain a high school diploma or general education development equivalency. Participation in ever-increasing professional military education opportunities such as leadership schools and academies is highly encouraged and pays great dividends to both the Air Force and the individual.

MINORITIES

I'd like to comment on this area by regressing a bit. The Air Force became an integrated unit by Presidential order in 1949. The fact that 23 years later a need for race relations courses became apparent is indicative that, "yes, we do have some racial problems." The progress made to date is quite gratifying and elicits appreciation for those who have sincerely applied their efforts to create awareness and respect for the worth and dignity of all individuals. Needless to say, discussions among Air Force people today are much more open and, from all indications, serve to pinpoint most problem areas quickly. There is still a need for everyone's cooperation and much work to be done in this vital area, if we are to live and work, as we must, in harmony to achieve our common objective.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership has been traditionally defined in military circles as "the art of influencing people to proceed willingly and enthusiastically toward a desired objective." Recent changes, in my opinion, have driven us into the need for closer examination of the basic or dictionary definition which is "the position or guidance of a leader" or "the ability to lead." I believe the inference here is one of leading by example. Many of our goals and objectives have changed as well as the values and beliefs of those who are to be lead. It seems to me then that it is perfectly normal to expect that some of the former philosophies of leadership must also change. There is a definite need for more interface of "leadership" and "management" linked together by the adjective "contemporary." Above all there must be integrity in the example provided. Summarily, it is quite easy to imagine the uneasiness of a leader caught up in the thrust of today's uncertainties and trying to deal with them using yesterday's techniques or applications. It is also quite easy to see that some change is inevitable.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

This facet of our military responsibilities is participated in by far too few of us. Yet, it carries an ever-increasing degree of importance. Many of us live in communities that surround our installations, send our children to public schools, attend churches, shop at community shopping centers, etc., and seldom realize the impression (favorable or otherwise) that our civilian counterparts have of us. We become in a sense ambassadors. The main thrust of my mentioning the above factors is that we, in our everyday actions, can provide immeasureable aid to the Community Service Program.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Thomas N. Barnes, 43, is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of the Air Force on matters pertaining to more than 561,000 enlisted personnel.

A native of Chester, Pennsylvania, CMSAF Barnes enlisted into the U.S. Air Force in April 1949 and served as a flight engineer with a troop carrier squadron during the Korean War.

During his Air Force career CMSAF Barnes has served as crew chief/flight engineer on aircraft ranging from the B-25 Mitchell bomber to the B-52 Stratofortress with the Strategic Air Command. He served with the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing in Southeast Asia in 1966.

CMSAF Barnes began working in his present job in October 1973. He was promoted to chief master sergeant on December 1, 1969.

"The young trooper is proud to be identified as a Marine—as being a member of an elite fighting force. . . ."

CLINTON A. PUCKETT

Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps

The retention or reenlistment rate in the Marine Corps is affected by numerous factors. Improved wage scales, better barracks, virtually unlimited educational opportunities, and other quality-of-life improvements certainly are worth consideration when a young Marine is approaching the end of his enlistment. In my opinion, however, the benefits of a Marine Corps career go far beyond a variable reenlistment bonus or other monetary gain.

To justify my stand, I would point out that we have no shortage of career people now. Most of our career Marines decided to make the Corps their life long before those very desirable advantages were developed. My contemporaries and I reenlisted because we enjoyed job satisfaction.

We felt that ours was an honorable profession and that we were professionals serving our country by service in its finest institution. Job satisfaction came from the belief . . . the knowledge . . . that we were contributing to the Nation's "force in readiness;" and that our contribution was recognized and appreciated by our superiors. If this observation is valid, then the key is leadership—at all levels.

There is another factor I should mention which I believe would apply equally to all our Armed Services. The retired force of military people is constantly growing. It is difficult to find a community wherein there are no retired enlisted persons.

These people serve as visual evidence of the benefits a military career has to offer the young American who is capable and willing to work to build a career. Also, the employment opportunity after retirement of 20 to 30 year's service is tremendous, not so much in relation to technical skills learned in service but in the area of leadership—the ability to organize and supervise—learned from years of experience. Would not these people encourage the young high school graduate to seek a military career?

In summary I would say that with the numerous advantages evident to all hands, we should enjoy an increasingly high reenlistment rate. I foresee the rate becoming so high, in fact, that we will maintain high quality standards—and this too I see as breeding an even higher reenlistment rate.

EDUCATION

The Marine Corps has already determined that a Marine must have a high school education or to have satisfactorily passed the high-school-level general education development (GED) test to be eligible for reenlistment. We staff NCOs think this is great because it ensures us of a more trainable Marine, one of far greater potential. Some of the finest Marines I have known have had very limited formal education, but these are the exceptions.

Statistics prove beyond doubt that the conduct and performance of duty of the lower mental group, poorly educated individual is inferior to that of the better educated, more mentally capable Marine.

Every Marine is a rifleman. Yet, there

MARINES—These two Marines typify the more than 172,000 enlisted men and women represented by Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Clinton A. Puckett.

are innumerable technical skills which must be learned and applied . . . by Marines. The learning of these skills requires mental capacity . . . and a solid educational background as a basis upon which to build. Too, this bright individual will not be so susceptible to scuttlebutt — bum scoop — which frequently creates dissatisfaction in the ranks and lowers morale and unit esprit de corps. This individual will be far more likely to think through his personal problems and seek assistance, rather than to take matters in his own hands by going AWOL.

Thought has been given to requiring the non-high-school-graduate first-term enlistee to attend classes leading to a high school diploma—compulsory education. Again, I say great! Such a program would reinforce what I said earlier: we would have a more highly qualified reenlistee or, in the case of those not reenlisting, a better citizen—high ideals indeed.

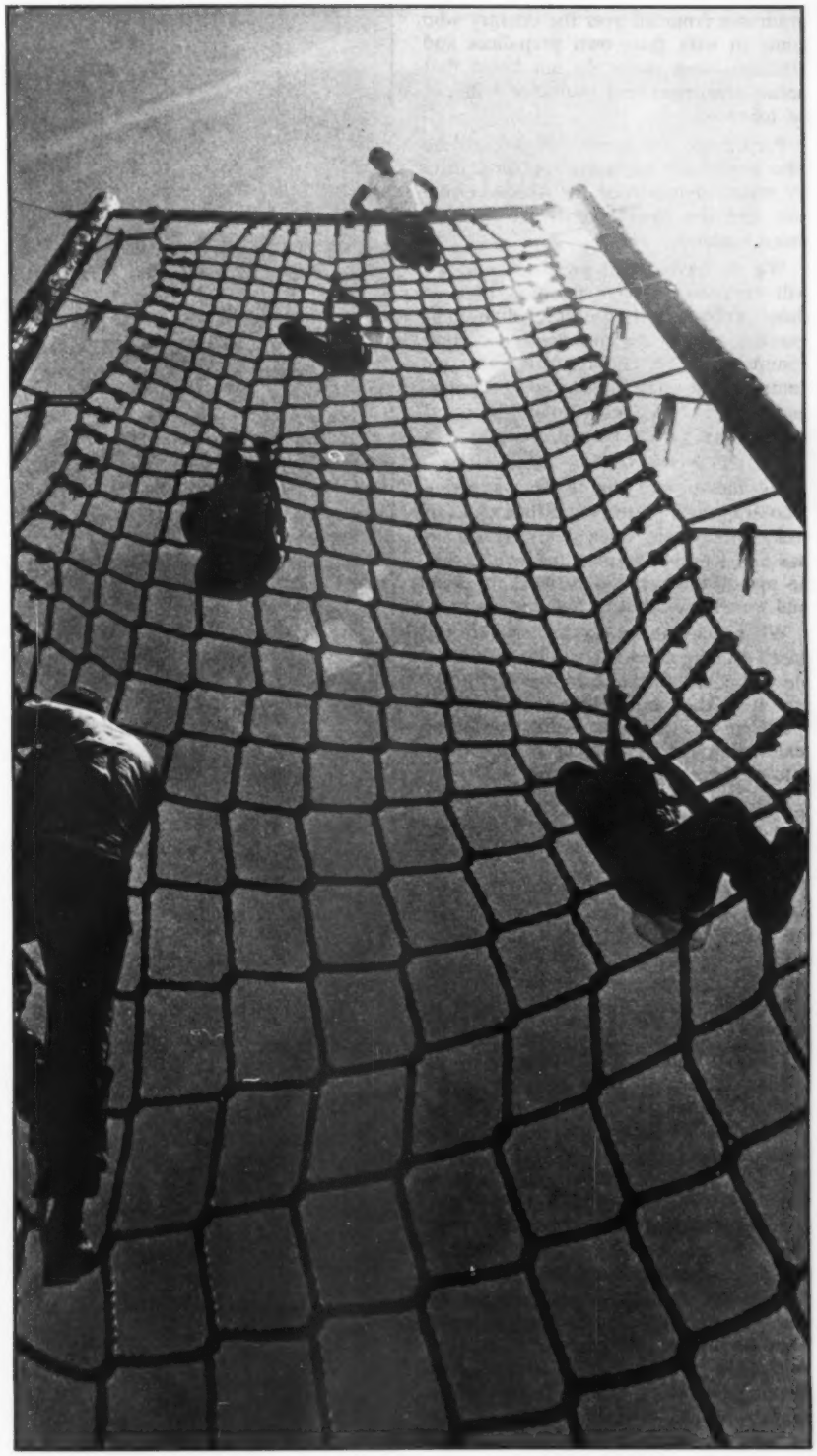
But . . . add this requirement to the commander's already overburdened training schedule, and we would find this program existing at the expense of training for our primary mission?

It seems to me that off-duty education is a more practical approach. We are encouraging self-study and constantly expanding the opportunity for such studies. We have educational programs that range from the high school diploma to two- and four-year college degrees. Essentially, our Marines are restricted by only two elements: ability and motivation.

MINORITIES

A Department of Defense-wide effort is underway to promote understanding and harmony within the ranks through human relations training. The Marine Corps approach differs in that it focuses on the individual rather than the distinctive characteristics of racial or ethnic groups. The heart of our program is a 20-hour human relations training course which is compulsory for all hands; the soul is our tradition of leadership—looking out for the welfare of our Marines . . . all our Marines.

Our training must be continuous because we require some 50,000 new recruits annually to maintain our current authorized strength. Therefore, we constantly have a new crop of boot camp



graduates from all over the country who come in with their own prejudices and attitudes—and many do not know that unfair treatment and prejudice will not be tolerated.

Prejudices die hard; likewise, those who have been the subject of prejudice, by whatever means or for whatever reason, are not easily convinced that we mean business.

We do have racial problems and we will continue to have them as long as those problems exist in the civilian community, for we are an extension of that community. To counter this fact our commandant has developed programs and issued directives demanding equal opportunity, fair treatment, and effective leadership, at all levels.

He has passed the word that those who are unwilling to play it that way can seek employment elsewhere. He meant this and I think Marines understand that he means business. It is working well, and we will continue to make progress.

What then can we do to accelerate the pace? As long as such conduct is acceptable within the "squad-bay society," nothing. It is the young Marine who must speed up the pace. It is he who must realize that failure to solve this problem is to endanger our country, our very way of life.

WOMEN

Several new occupational fields have been opened to Women Marines. There are many other specialties which could easily be performed by qualified women. However, we are not anticipating a significate increase in the number of women authorized to serve.

I would equate this to the hiring of civilian messmen. It is certainly desirable to relieve our Marines, both male and female, of such duty; and from my observations these civilians are doing a fine job. But—when the bugle sounds for war, or for the training for war, the civilian messmen do not pick up their rifles. So, too, with our Women Marines, due to the nature of our business, and the fact of life that our American society does not want its women bearing arms. They simply can not be ordered into the field with an air-ground team. And therein lies the problem; for every Woman Marine or civilian messman that we take on, we lose space for a Marine rifleman. If we could have the Women Marines and the civilian messmen in addition to the riflemen they replaced it would be another matter.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Marine Corps has long supported Community Service. "Toys for Tots," "Devil Pups," "Young Marines," and the Marine Corps Youth Physical Fitness Program are a few of our better known nationwide programs. The order which describes staff NCO promotion policies and procedures lists community activities as special qualifications to be considered in selection for promotion of staff NCO grades.

We serve the Nation; therefore, any Community Service which promotes the welfare of American citizens is our responsibility. Too, any activity by the Corps or by individual Marines which contributes to public trust and understanding is not only worthwhile, but absolutely necessary.

The Secretary of Defense's interest in this area has served to emphasized the importance of such action in a peacetime environment. I see Marines at various posts seeking new and improved projects and I personally encourage them. A word of caution, though . . . our primary mission must come first.

LEADERSHIP

When some of the other Services decided to liberalize grooming standards, many Marines were also in favor of revising our regulations. The commandant determined that we would stand fast; he would not chase civilian fads and fashions. This decision caused some dissatifaction in the ranks, particularly among the younger Marines.

There was much discussion on the subject. It was virtually impossible to conduct a question-and-answer-session following a period of instruction or indoctrination without the subject being debated. The biggest single complaint of the young trooper was that due to his

TRAINING—The Marines—always strong on regimentation—plan to continue training as always because time has proven this training is essential to developing the special Marine pride.

haircut he could be recognized as a Marine even when on liberty in civilian clothes.

Time has proven the commandant to be right. Marines still have a worldwide reputation for smartness of appearance and the young trooper is proud to be identified as a Marine—as being a member of an elite fighting force—even when attired in civilian dress; today, it is a rare occasion indeed when the matter of grooming is discussed, except to criticize those who present a slovenly appearance.

We Marines have always prided ourselves in being strong on regimentation. Our recruit training is possibly even tougher today, both physically and mentally, than when I enlisted. We plan to continue training our Marines as we always have, because time has proven this training is essential to the development of that special Marine pride—that special Marine esprit de corps—that special ingredient which causes Marines to fight like giants, turning defeat into victory in such places as Guadalcanal, the Chosen Reservoir and Con Tien.

However, we have also prided ourselves in being a modern military force with emphasis on our most prized asset . . . the individual Marine. We did not have to direct commanders to endeavor to remove on all occasions those causes which make for misunderstanding or dissatisfaction. That sentence was already in the Marine Corps Manual which was written and published many decades ago.

Modern-type quarters? You don't have to train to be miserable! The Marine Corps Manual also states that it is necessary for officers and noncommissioned officers to devote close attention to the many questions affecting the comfort, health, morals, religious guidance, military training, and discipline of the men under their command, and also actively to enlist the interest of their men in building up and maintaining their bodies in the finest physical condition; to encourage them to improve their professional knowledge and to make every effort by means of historical, educational, and patriotic addresses to cultivate in their hearts a deep, abiding love of the Corps and Country. The new quarters adds many desirable elements—the most important, I belive, to be dignity.

Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Clinton A. Puckett, 47, assumed his top job on February 1, 1973, as the principal advisor to the Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps on matters affecting more than 172,000 enlisted men and women.

SMMC Puckett, born in Oklahoma, was raised in Roswell, New Mexico. He enlisted into the Marine Corps in February 1944 and as a rifleman landed on Iwo Jima in February 1945. It was there that he personally witnessed the famous flag raising on Mount Suribachi on February 23, 1945.

As a staff sergeant he earned the Navy Cross for "extraordinary heroism" while fighting in Korea in June 1952.

He was promoted to Marine Sergeant Major while serving at the Marine Barracks, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in February 1960.

SMMC Puckett is married and has two daughters.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (Aircrewman) John D. Whittet was born in Providence, Rhode Island, 48 years ago. Today, he is the principal advisor to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations on matters affecting more than 488,000 Navy men and women.

MCPON Whittet enlisted in the Navy in March 1943. After aircrew training, he was assigned to the Pacific during World War II and earned his combat wings by flying 31 missions with torpedo squadrons. He also served in the Korean War and participated in combat action.

Master Chief Whittet has been in his present assignment since April 1971. He is married and has three children, one of whom is a member of the U.S. Navy.

The Navy's top noncommissioned officer was promoted to his present grade in November 1967.

With the exception of bonus money that is needed in certain critical areas, I believe that the Navy is becoming more competitive with the pay and benefit structure of civilian society. However, there is a real limit to what you can do with money. It will only motivate to a certain degree, and beyond that we are talking about such things as job satisfaction and environment. These two areas, in my judgment, are the crux of the retention issue, and I think that now more than ever, we are going to find that our retention rate will be keyed very heavily to our ability to provide job satisfaction and improved habitability.

The young people that we recruit today come from an unprecedented environment of affluence. More often than not, when I talk to people who are leaving the Navy, it boils down to the hard reality that they are simply not satisfied with what they're doing or how they are living. Very seldom do I hear anyone compare the wage they're drawing with that of somebody else.

Job Satisfaction

We are trying to improve job satisfaction by continually upgrading our classification process to help our people get off on the right foot and train for the kind of work that they are both interested in and capable of doing.

In the area of habitability, we have a particular problem in the Navy because of the very limited space aboard ship devoted to living quarters. I am by no means suggesting that we turn our warships into luxury liners; but I do want to stress the need for a more contemporary reconciliation between lavish civilian quarters across the country and the generally small and relatively uncomfortable living spaces that our sailors must put up with at sea.

To meet this challenge we are trying very hard to get the dollars that are necessary to upgrade the living spaces aboard our ships. And aside from new ship construction, many a Navy vessel has been substantially refurbished, in recent years, through shipboard talent and initiative "self-help" projects.

Family Separation

Another vital area, as far as retention is concerned, is the amount of family separation that our sailors endure. To reduce the amount of family separation, we have established an overseas homeporting program throughout the Pacific and the Mediterranean, which has the the effect of increasing the time our ship-based personnel can spend in port with their families. This program also increases the time that our Continental United States-based ships are able to spend in their homeports. We estimate that the ships affected by our overseas homeporting program will spend approximately 50 percent of their time actually steaming, 35 percent in their own home-

"A real leader . . . can take these young people . . . train them to be good sailors and still allow them . . . individual dignity. . . ."

JOHN D. WHITTET

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy

port and 15 percent in other ports.

But aside from money, benefits, improving shipboard habitability and reducing family separation time, the real retention challenge is concerned leadership. To be able to motivate people and to make their work more satisfying . . . that is the thing!

The Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Naval Personnel are two of the most dynamic leaders that the Navy has produced in my lifetime. Under their very excellent direction, the tone and quality of leadership throughout the entire Navy has developed considerably. I am certain that this has been one of the strongest factors in improving our retention all across the board from first termers to careerists.

EDUCATION

It has often been said by various people in the education field that we have the best technical schools in the world. Naturally, I do have a lot of confidence in our ability to train young men and women to fill the many different kinds of jobs that we have to do.

It would be nice if every recruit had at least a high school education, and most of our recruits do, in fact, have high school diplomas, but we must be flexible enough to realize that the high school diploma is not a panacea to the continual challenge of obtaining quality recruits. It is certainly no guarantee that an individual will be successful in the naval Service. Some of our young people who come to us with high school educations have yet to develop the ability that we might expect. Some even have difficulty just reading and comprehending what they have read.

On the other hand, many of our people who do not have high school educations have been very successful in their careers. Generally speaking, however, the high school diploma is a reliable credential, and we are seeking to recruit individuals who have not only a high school education but also a sincere desire to continue to grow and help meet the needs of the most technical and sophisticated Navy on earth.

You've heard the story of how you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink . . . well you can also lead a person to school but that doesn't mean that you can make him think! I believe that it is better to motivate people through proper counseling and good leadership and then they will draw the right conclusions about education for themselves. I am opposed to programs of compulsory education in the Navy, as long as they can be avoided.

COMMUNITY SERVICE—Naval Sea Scout Scott Cooper, right, receives instruction in the operation of a pelorus from Navy Seaman George Richardson of the Naval Air Station Point Mugu, California.

MINORITIES

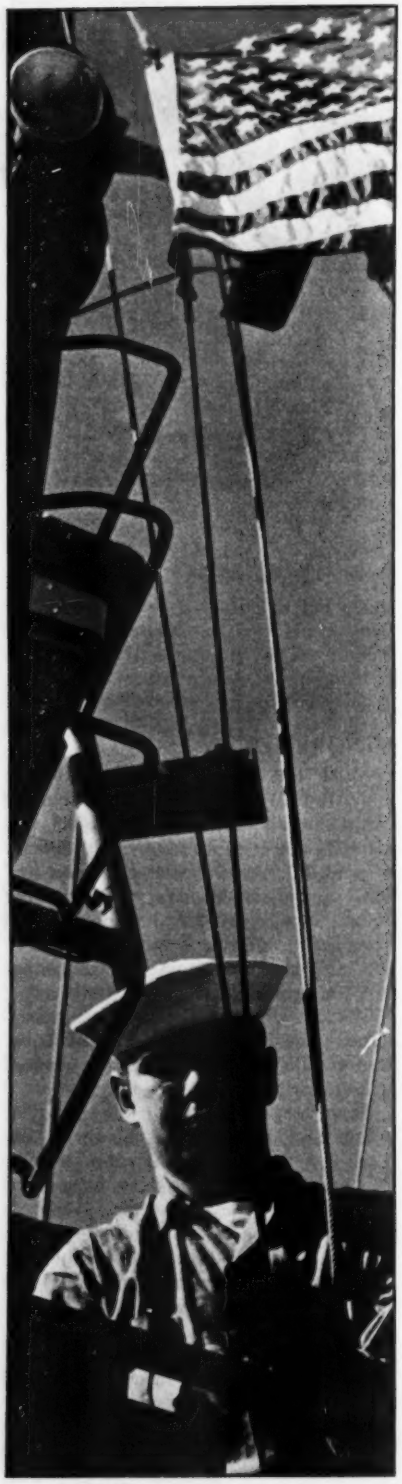
Much the same can be said for the alleviation of racial problems. Prejudice can be a difficult thing to isolate and identify, and it can be extremely difficult to correct. We can issue directives and turn out paper all day long but that doesn't mean people will read what has been stated and take it into their hearts. We can educate people but we cannot legislate attitudes.

We do, of course, insist upon discipline. Equal opportunity means equal responsibility, and we simply cannot tolerate undisciplined actions.

However firm and to the point or subtle and indirect, the answer is obviously a process of education. Maybe it is because we rub shoulders a lot in the Navy, but I believe that we have made substantial progress in eliminating racial prejudice and discrimination within the Navy. It is a slow ball game but I believe that we are winning.

WOMEN

Of course, women have been in the Navy for years, but now we are expanding their role in a very dramatic way. Most of our rating groups are now open



to women, and I really don't anticipate that many problems. Obviously, there are jobs that take more physical stamina than others, but the ability to learn and absorb appears to be about equal between men and women, and that is the really important thing.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

I support legitimate Community Service on the part of active duty Navymen and Navywomen because wherever we are, we're a part of the community too! When you have children attending civilian schools and you are living in a civilian community, you are an integral part of that community, and I don't think we can ever afford the luxury of divorcing ourselves from civic involvement. It is the policy of the Navy to commend involvement in civic and community matters, and many of our more successful people in the enlisted ranks are, in fact, people who are involved in civic activities.

LEADERSHIP

If you look back over the years, we can safely say that Service life is not quite as rigorous as it was 20 or 30 years ago, but then, neither is civilian life, and I think that contemporary leadership must reflect our changing times.

I can remember just a few years back when we saw a young man on the street with long hair and we really considered him to be unusual. If you look around now, many of our professional people, doctors, lawyers and our members of Congress, are wearing longer hair and they're certainly accepted. We in the Navy are wearing our hair a little bit longer. We can't be in such a rut that we're unable to see what society is and how it changes. We have to be able to relate military life style to civilian life and at the same time maintain good order and discipline. This is a real challenge to leadership!

The main thing that I would suggest to those people who are in positions of leadership is to get out and find out what's going on in the world around them. That world, the civilian community, didn't stop still on the day they came into the Navy; it has progressed just like everything else has, and until we become more contemporary, we've got little hope of ever attracting quality people and holding them . . . and this is not so much a point of view as it is a matter of fact!

I visit commands on a continuing basis all around the world. When I see a command that is completely squared away, I know that it has taken considerable effort on the part of its leaders. It used to be easy to say "do it" because I have three or four stripes on my arm and I want it done. But that certainly isn't leadership today, if, indeed, it ever was. A real leader is the person who can take these young people today and train them to be good sailors and still allow them to live with individual dignity and feel like they're a part of society. This to me is what our American military system is all about. An individual who is properly trained and properly led will produce. Even when the chips are down, he will come through for you. But young people today, as always, must have the benefit of good solid leadership.

I don't think there has ever been a time in my life when leadership was more of a challenge than it is right now. And the sequel to that is my view that there has never been a time, to my knowledge, when naval leaders were more capable than they are today. Oh yes, we have our problems, but we attack them with great vigor, and I believe that the state of the art, as I say, has probably never been higher.

FLAG RAISING—A young sailor raises the American flag aboard an aviation recovery vessel.

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